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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

25 March

Dear Bob:

Your letter concerning the intelligence estimates on Soviet ground forces raises some very serious points about their reliability, consistency and ranges of uncertainty. I agree that we need a new and thorough study to evaluate all available information and to produce estimates which better reflect the ranges of uncertainty concerning the aspects of Soviet ground forces specified in your letter.

I understand that you sent a memorandum to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff requesting much the same type of study; this was forwarded to DIA for implementation. A proposal to merge these two studies has been discussed with General Carroll. Because your request to him and other DIA needs require that his study be completed by May, General Carroll intends to proceed with the DIA study; however, he did offer assistance in the preparation of a study in response to your letter to me.

I propose to handle the matter as follows:

1. A task force of CIA and DIA personnel will be established under CIA direction. The participation of one or two qualified people from your staff as observers could aid us in interpreting your requirements for information and in obtaining US cost data for comparative purposes. They could also help you in evaluating the results of the study.
2. This task force will review all pertinent evidence and prepare a thorough and objective study on manpower, equipment, and the qualitative aspects of Soviet ground forces. I plan to ask the Board of National Estimates to review this study, and of course General Carroll and I will review it.
3. Wherever possible, the ranges of uncertainty will be treated explicitly according to the definitiveness and the reliability of the evidence.

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4. A preliminary report will be forwarded to you in July, and at this point we will decide on the type of long run program that will best serve to improve our estimates in this field.

Assuming that the arrangements outlined above meet with your approval I will initiate the study. Please nominate one or two members of your staff as observers for this project.

I would like to comment on some of the substantive statements in your letter. In evaluating Soviet military forces there is the danger of inferring that the Soviets have the same doctrine on organization and employment of forces as the US. Even in 1960, the combat tasks envisioned by the US and the USSR for their ground divisions resulted in different organizational and deployment postures; recent changes appear to have increased these differences. For example, Soviet divisional strengths are far below those of either the US pentomic or ROAD divisions. It is now estimated that there are about half as many men in a typical combat ready Soviet tank division as there are in a typical US armored division. Other significant differences exist in procurement policy, logistic support, and mobilization concepts.

In reply to your request for information on how the Soviets are allocating their military expenditures, I have attached to this letter a recent CIA study prepared in support of NIE 11-4-63 which is currently in process. This study includes estimates of expenditures by mission and category in terms which are as comparable to those of the US as Soviet organization and data limitations permit. There is also an extensive section on the similarities and differences in the scope of US accounts and those used in the study. The study covers the period 1958 through 1967; however, the estimates for the future have a very wide range of uncertainty. The Agency has made similar studies annually for more than five years, and although the full details of such studies have not been included in National Intelligence Estimates, they have been used to assess the economic feasibility of estimated Soviet military programs. It was the long history of experience in this field which permitted the Agency to contribute the "costing" aspect of the work of the CIA-DIA Joint Analysis Group mentioned in your letter. Furthermore, another Estimate (NIE 11-5-63), currently in process, will examine the problems facing the Soviet economy including the broader aspects of military and space programs.

Sincerely,

John A. McCone

Honorable Robert S. McNamara
Secretary of Defense
Washington 25, D. C.